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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 002166

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/24/2018

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: RELATIONS WITH GREECE STEADILY
IMPROVING...GENERALLY

Classified By: Ambassador James Jeffrey for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) During a December 19 courtesy call with Greek Ambassador Fotios Xydias, he and Ambassador agreed that there remain a number of problems in Turkey-Greece relations, including delimitation of borders and EEZs in the Aegean, flow of third-country migrants, treatment of religious minorities and the status of the Patriarchy, and Cyprus. However, Ambassador noted the marked improvement in the bilateral relationship in recent years, especially compared to the situation that prevailed during Ambassador's previous tours. Xydias agreed, saying the real progress had been in the two countries' ability to work together to prevent such issues from escalating into crises. Ankara's understanding that Athens fully supports Turkey in its fight against the PKK has eliminated much of the tension, according to Xydias.

¶2. (C) Ambassador underscored the need for the GOG to implement the European Court of Human Rights decision to allow ethnic Turks to self-identify in Thrace in order to set an example for the GOT regarding Greek minority and religious rights in Turkey. It is important for Thrace to be fed into the larger concept of regional rapprochement. He reminded Xydias that Turkey is located in a difficult and complicated neighborhood and is attempting to play a constructive role. Accordingly, the GOG should nurture all signs of progress. Xydias assured the Ambassador the Greek Government is trying to encourage peace and prosperity in the region.

¶3. (C) Xydias noted the Turkish General Staff (TGS) is today more willing to work cooperatively with Greek counterparts, however, more than promises are necessary to quell mistrust stemming from Aegean territorial violations. TGS repeatedly dismisses Greek protests of illegal flights over undisputed, populated islands, saying it is just Turkish pilots acting on their own accord or mistakenly straying into Greek airspace during routine patrols. He raised a recent alleged overflight of a Greek island by two "armed" Turkish F-16s. Ambassador responded that the Turkish response to the decision to hold the Noble Archer exercises in the Aegean was moderate; the tone of the Greek press was taunting and self-congratulatory.

¶4. (C) Xydias explained that third country migrants entering Greece from Turkey are placing an overwhelming strain on local Greek governments, particularly the health system. The readmission protocol with Turkey is not working well. Furthermore, the GOT, said Xydias, is reluctant to sign an agreement with the EU on return of migrants entering the EU from Turkey for fear it would negatively impact the pace of domestic reforms in Turkey. To deal with this problem, Italian, French, and Norwegian vessels are now patrolling the

waters with the Greek Coast Guard.

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Jeffrey